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ABSTRACT

A model for an interdisciplinary graduate degree program based on the Behavioral Science Graduate degree program at California State University at Dominguez Hills is described. In light of the declining resources available to higher education institutions it is recommended that curricular programs be accountable and responsive to the needs of the students and the community and emphasize flexibility and cost effectiveness. The importance of considering student interests, available faculty and facilities, and marketability of graduates when developing a graduate program is emphasized. The program described allows students to choose among three options in an effort to provide greater professional mobility and academic preparation. Faculty from several departments are utilized, stimulating interdepartmental communication and effective use of resources. The courses are sequential and allow for completion of eight specific objectives and facilitate program evaluation. A set of core courses provides fundamental skills enabling students to master other skills in subsequent courses. A graduate student association, viewed as an essential aspect of the program, provides peer support and a mechanism for faculty and student interchange. It is suggested that this type of a program maximizes the instructional process and responds to the needs of faculty, students, administrators, and the community. Courses included in the Behavioral Science Graduate Program are described and an evaluation matrix for the program is included. (Author/SF)

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ABSTRACT

At a time of shrinking resources due to the influx of state and reduced support from governmental sources, it is imperative that curricular programs be accountable and responsive to the needs of students and the community which an institution serves. It is, therefore, essential that designers of graduate degree programs adopt models which allow for flexibility and maximum cost-effectiveness. This paper describes a model for graduate degree programs that responds very successfully to these concerns and which can be generalized and adapted to a multitude of contexts.

First, the program is designed through an interdisciplinary framework, allowing students to choose from three options and, thereby, providing the university essentially three graduate programs; it is assumed, furthermore, that the students gain greater professional mobility and academic preparation through this structure. Second, because of its interdisciplinary structure, the program utilizes faculty from other departments, thereby, becoming more cost-effective through cross-indexing of courses and stimulating greater communication among departmental units. Third, the flexible nature of the program provides for relative ease in adding or deleting an option, as well as in developing new degree programs previously incorporated within the program as options and in testing the appropriateness of a new course through a special topics instructional offering; this flexibility allows the program to be particularly responsive to the changing needs of students and the job market. Fourth, all courses in the program follow a very logical sequence, thereby, providing maximum payoff of the instructional process to students; the systematic nature of the curriculum allows for the completion of eight specific programmatic objectives, not simply just the mastery of content as is the case for the majority of institutional curricular programs. Fifth, the systematic instructional scheme provides not only a sound planning device for the program but also an efficient approach to programmatic evaluation. Sixth, the graduate student association for the program provides not only an integral aspect of support, but also a means for faculty and students to work through a number of activities as a team.

The program exemplifying this model maximizes the instructional process in the way in which it responds to the needs of faculty, students, administrators, and the community.

MAXIMIZING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS:
A MODEL FOR THE DESIGN OF GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

In designing a degree program, a university must take a number of factors into consideration. Among these are student interest, available faculty and facilities, cost-effectiveness, marketability of graduates. The particular structuring of a new program is crucial to its success; its ability to be flexible is important, so that it may meet the changing demands of its students and the job market. This paper will describe a model for an umbrella graduate degree program, one that responds very successfully to these concerns and which can be generalized and adapted to a multitude of contexts.

The Behavioral Science Graduate Program at California State University, Dominguez Hills is administered through the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The program is aimed at the acquisition of skills and knowledge by students which cross-cut traditional academic boundaries of specialization. In this way, it is assumed, the student obtains the theoretical and methodological perspectives of several academic disciplines (in this case, Anthropology, Communication, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology), rather than the narrow perspective of only one; this approach provides a student with better preparation and professional mobility, when he becomes a working practitioner in the field, as the majority of these students do. It is the position of the program that whatever field the student embarks upon after graduation, whether it be employment counseling, social work, probationary work, marriage and family counseling, health services work, or personnel specialization, no one generic discipline alone can provide him the tools necessary to solve problems associated with human behavior. The program is structured in such a way as to prepare its students for the variety of situations they may encounter as professionals, whether

they have psychological, sociological, cultural, or political implications. The major thrust of the program is the application of concepts within and between the generic disciplines of the behavioral sciences to practical situations. This is accomplished through three strands inherent within the program which can be applied to any of the occupational contexts: theory, research, and administration.

The program utilizes a small core of faculty, as well as the services of faculty from related disciplines. In this way, the program becomes extremely cost-effective. The faculty workload is spread, in large part, over four outside academic departments and is, therefore, absorbed primarily within the normal faculty and clerical allocations for these instructional units. Basically, the program operates at the cost of a department chairperson (one course per quarter term release time), two full-time faculty members, a secretary, and a department office.

The umbrella structure of the program is reflected in the various options it offers. In essence, the University is able to provide graduate programs in three different areas (Applied Behavioral Science, Gerontology, Sociology) through the guise of a single program. A student chooses from the three options and structures his coursework accordingly. The flexible nature of the program allows for the addition or deletion of options as student demands dictate them; this makes the program especially responsible to student needs and interests, as well as to the changing job market. Further, the program provides a testing ground for degree programs, initiated first as options or emphasis areas. For example, what was for several years an option in Psychology in the Behavioral Science Graduate Program

is now a full campus graduate degree program with options in General Psychology and Clinical-Community Psychology. In addition, what has for several years been an informal emphasis area in Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling will be a full master of science degree program at the University, upon its completion through the formal review process. In order to meet current student demands for a new programmatic focus, an option in Organizational Administration has been proposed and is currently undergoing review. Generally speaking, each time a new option has been developed for the program, the courses necessary for its support have already existed, another instance of the cost-effectiveness of this particular program. The options inherent in this structure offer a greater range of specialization areas for students to choose from; for the University, they provide the capability to remain competitive with other institutions, higher potential enrollment, and additional identity within the external community.

Because of its interdisciplinary nature, the program requires cooperation among a number of academic units, thus fostering communication among various departmental faculties. This leads to more effective utilization of resources and cross-indexing of courses between departments. Faculty members who might not normally convene to exchange ideas find themselves discussing instructional concerns; for example, psychologists and sociologists who typically isolate themselves within the confines of their own disciplines (specifically, in their respective interpretations of human behavior) communicate regularly in regard to the day-to-day operation of the program.

Courses developed for the Behavioral Science Graduate Program

follow a very logical sequence. Regardless of the option, each student matriculates through a systematic curriculum designed to complete specific objectives. This scheme in reality is adaptable to any college curriculum, even one in the liberal arts; not only does this scheme provide a logical means for curricular planning, it also offers an efficient approach to programmatic evaluation. While most curricular programs focus upon the content of a specific field, the Behavioral Science Graduate Program requires the mastery of seven other areas by its students: (1) history or development of the field, including the comparison of theories through the evolution of the specialization area; (2) methods of the field; (3) reference tools particular to the field; (4) presentation of findings; (5) process of defining problems particular to the field; (6) technical terms associated with the disciplinary area; and (7) both auxiliary and ancillary disciplines bearing potential relationships with the one in focus.[1] This model is particularly relevant to an interdisciplinary graduate program such as this one, in which the theoretical and methodological considerations from several generic areas of specialization are examined both comparatively and in their integrated state. The program offers its curriculum in such a way that a set of core courses provide certain fundamental skills enabling students to obtain the mastery of other skills in subsequent courses, much in the sense of building blocks, all leading eventually to the full acquisition of the skills described in the systematic model.

Through a delineation of some of the courses offered by the program, it becomes more obvious how the model operates and how

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[1] In the sciences, there probably is greater attention to the development of subject matter and research methods competence, but the remaining areas are not systematically developed. In the liberal arts, only the subject matter is systematically considered in developing curriculum.

the curriculum is truly interrelated. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 414, 420, and 440 form a logical sequence. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 414, Introduction to Statistics and Research Methods, students are introduced to some of the basic methods of behavioral research, including the design of empirical studies and the role of inferential statistics in interpreting data. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 420, Critique of Programs and Practices, students improve their familiarity with these topics by critiquing published research in an area of behavioral science of their own choosing. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 440, Program Evaluation, students plan three research studies in an area which they select. Throughout, there is a strong emphasis upon the logic of the research process.

The demands placed upon students increase systematically with each course. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 414, the emphasis is upon the definition of terms, the mechanics of calculating statistics, and the elements of empirical research in an ideal world. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 420, the emphasis is upon comparing the ideals with the realities of what is actually published. In BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 440, the emphasis lies in planning one's own real-world research and expressing this plan formally in writing. A student completing this sequence is well-prepared to write the departmental comprehensive examination in methods, and for the technical portion of the departmental applied problem examination, or for writing a thesis proposal.

The basic sequence can be enriched through election of BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 401 and 412. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 401, Advanced Statistics for Behavioral Science, provides the student with an opportunity to study one or two advanced statistical concepts in detail. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 412, Computer Applications in Behavioral Science, provides experience in using the computer to analyze data.

Augmenting these elective courses, through another strand inherent within the program, are a number of other ones dealing primarily with various theoretical orietations. These include: (1) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 403, Behavioral Science Foundations for Administrators; (2) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 404, Grant Proposal Writing; (3) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 411, Cross-Cultural Behavior in Complex Societies; (4) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 417, Attitude Change and Persuasion; (5) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 422, The Design of Social Systems; (6) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 430, Studies in Human Communication; (7) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 431, Organizational Communication Behavior; (8) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 434, Seminar in Behavioral Control; (9) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 443, Seminar in Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling; (10) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 445, Seminar in Retirement Planning; and (11) BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 455, Theories of Gerontology. A required course, BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 410, Seminar in Theory, provides students with the fundamental skills necessary to undertake the elective theory courses and eventually the departmental comprehensive examination in theory.

In addition to these curricular offerings, the program has a special topics course, BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 416. Through its inclusion in the schedule, various courses can be tested, prior to their permanent implementation, or instruction not normally offered, but available temporarily through the services of a unique practitioner, can be provided to students. Examples of courses offered through BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 416 include: (1) Grant Proposal Writing (prior to its incorporation in the regular curriculum); (2) Small Group Process; (3) Communication and Conflict.

Developing a programmatic evaluation around the model is relatively uncomplicated. Essentially, one needs only to build a matrix, with one side representing the course offerings in which

the objectives are to be accomplished and with the other side representing each of the mastery areas. This way the evaluation process represents an adaptation of the curricular planning process. The evaluator would examine the program through checking off the specific mastery areas as they pertain to each of the curricular offerings, as shown in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Obviously, each course would vary in its ability to deal with each of the mastery areas. The evaluator would concern himself with the overall scope of the program and the acquisition of skills in a logical progression, as well as their completion achievement upon the graduation of its students.

An integral part of the program at Dominguez Hills is the Behavioral Science Graduate Student Association. The Association has four major roles in functioning through and for the program: (1) recruiting new students; (2) providing a job search service, whether this be for short-term consulting assignments or long-term employment during matriculation or upon graduation; (3) providing a tutoring service for students on campus from the program or from other academic units; and (4) arranging speaker visitations and social activities for students within the program. It is the aim of the Association to enhance teamwork between faculty and students and to maintain the high level of student support for the program which exists. A current example of faculty-student teamwork operating through the program is a National Science Foundation Graduate Traineeship Grant, providing students support to work with specific faculty on research projects

related to their own educational goals.

In an era of shrinking resources due to the influx of steady state and reduced support from governmental sources, it is imperative that curricular programs be accountable and responsive to the needs of students and the community which an institution serves. It is, therefore, essential that designers of graduate degree programs adopt models which allow for flexibility and maximum cost-effectiveness. The Behavioral Science Graduate Program at California State University, Dominguez Hills exemplifies a model which maximizes payoff to students and the instructional process itself.

	Field Content	Field History	Field Methods	Field Reference Tools	Presentation of Field Results	Definition of Field Problems	Field Terminology	Auxiliary & Ancillary Disciplines
RESEARCH STRAND								
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 414 *Introduction to Statistics and Research Methods*	S		P				P	
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 420 *Critique of Programs and Practices*		P		S	P	P	S	
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 440 *Program Evaluation*	S	S			S	P	S	P
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 401 *Advanced Statistics for Behavioral Science*	S		P	P			S	
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 412 *Computer Applications in Behavioral Science*			P				P	
ADMINISTRATION STRAND								
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 403 *Behavioral Science Foundations for Administrators*	P	S				P		S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 431 *Organizational Communication Behavior*	P	P	S			P	S	S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 404 *Grant Proposal Writing*	S		P		S		S	
THEORY STRAND								
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 410 *Seminar in Theory*	P	P				P		S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 411 *Cross-Cultural Behavior in Complex Societies*	P		S		S	P		
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 417 *Attitude Change and Persuasion*	P	P	S			P	S	S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 430 *Studies in Human Communication*	P	P	S			P	S	S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 422 *The Design of Social Systems*	P	P					S	
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 434 *Seminar in Behavioral Control*	P					P		S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 443 *Seminar in Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling*			P		S			
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 445 *Seminar in Retirement Planning*			P	S		P		S
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE 455 *Theories of Gerontology*	P	P				P	S	S

Figure 1. Evaluation Matrix for the Behavioral Science Graduate Program

P = Primary Application

S = Secondary Application